



A November day frozen in time

THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

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Let the word go forth from this time and place to friend and foe alike that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.

— From the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy, as excerpted and engraved on the Kennedy Memorial Grave at Arlington National Cemetery.

ENQUIRER NEWS SERVICES

DALLAS — It has been 25 years now, and he is 71 years old and retired. But Dr. M.T. Jenkins still remembers so very much about that day.

He remembers a call over the hospital intercom, and he remembers sirens, wailing so loudly and for too long. He remembers the surprisingly tall man, a victim of massive gunshot wounds, sprawled on a table in Trauma Room 1.

Most of all, Jenkins remembers a woman, her suit splattered with blood, her hands crimson and moist. He remembers that she cupped her hands in front of her, the way a priest creates a vessel of flesh as if to protect a soul.

He remembers that this woman did not relax her grip as the doctors worked over her husband.

"She looked so drawn and so white and so wide-eyed," Jenkins remembers. "Finally, she nudged me with her elbow

It was a moment instantly transformed into a reference point for all that came before and all that came after. An entire generation learned during that chilly weekend in November something about life and death, grief and stoicism, dignity, decorum and democracy.

and gave me what she had in her hands."

When Jenkins saw what this was, he shivered. And now, this doctor who thought he had seen it all realized the enormity of what was happening.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th president of the United States, the hope and inspiration of a new generation of Americans, was on that table in Trauma Room 1 at Parkland Memorial Hospital.

And he was dead.

"Let every nation know whether it wishes us well or ill that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Tuesday marks the 25th anniversary of the assassination of John Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963. For many Americans, it will be a day of reflection.

For younger Americans, those raised on a more-recent crop of politicians, it

may be difficult to appreciate what Kennedy meant to many of their elders.

It is not easy to explain. Perhaps Nettie Pollard can help.

Back then, her husband, Clifton, was an extra in the very last scene of this drama. Clifton Pollard was a gravedigger at Arlington Memorial Cemetery.

Now, 25 years later, Nettie Pollard recalls how she learned that Kennedy was dead.

"They just shot our president," a friend told her.

"Our" president. Not "the" president. That's how many people viewed Kennedy.

Like Nettie Pollard, nearly every American above the age of 35 remembers Nov. 22, 1963, one of those rare occasions in history instantly transformed into a reference point for all that came before and all that came after.

An entire generation learned during

that chilly weekend in November something about life and death, grief and stoicism, dignity, decorum and democracy.

It started with a misfit who called himself a Marxist, who defected to the Soviet Union but returned to America, who supported Cuban dictator Fidel Castro.

His name was Lee Harvey Oswald, and he changed America with three shots from a mail-order rifle that cost \$21.45, shipping, handling and telescopic sight included.

Within five years, another assassin would cut down civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and another would slay Robert F. Kennedy, the dead president's brother.

For millions of Americans, the damn nightmare would not end. And it seemed particularly cruel, because the dream had begun so promisingly with a candidate called John Kennedy.

Kennedy, the Democratic nominee from a rich, powerful and Catholic family, had been elected in 1960 at age 43. His youth and vitality appealed to millions of Americans searching for an antidote to eight years of dull if generally effective rule by Republican Dwight Eisenhower.

America in the early 1960s was an
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utterly different time. Life was slower, less violent, more mannered, but also more racist, more sexist and more ominous.

But over the years, a mythology has flowered around Kennedy, one that can too easily mask his flaws and failures.

"Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy," Sen. Lloyd Bentsen D-Texas, barked at Sen. Dan Quayle, R-Ind., as they debated the prospect of the U.S. vice presidency last month. But what, indeed, is a Jack Kennedy today, a quarter-century later?

Is he the frost-breathed Jack Kennedy of that freezing-cold January Inauguration Day in 1961, calling on "the new generation of Americans?"

Or is he the over-reaching Jack Kennedy who, just three months into his presidency, blundered into a disastrous invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs with a weak force of 1,400 volunteer anti-Castro emigres?

Or the Jack Kennedy of two months later, who sent 400 U.S. marshals to protect civil rights Freedom Riders in Montgomery, Ala.?

Or, perhaps, the Jack Kennedy portrayed as a sexual athlete whose ascension to the White House did not curb his voracious appetite?

Or the macho Jack Kennedy who, during scary days in October, 1962, convinced Nikita Khrushchev to pack up his missiles and get out of Cuba?

Perhaps, a quarter-century later, it doesn't matter. Kennedy is larger than life, his myth perhaps larger than death.

Forever 46 years old

Wipe away those six awful seconds in Dallas and Kennedy would be 71 now.

White-haired, probably a little jowly around his beaming smile, you can picture him buttoning his topcoat, ducking hatless into a raw November wind after lunch with old political pals.

Wipe away those six awful seconds and it would all be different. But from his sniper's nest, Oswald didn't miss. And 25 years later, the country is dealing with a John Kennedy who, after just 1,031 days in the White House, in the eyes of his countrymen will forever be 46 years old.

They think. If Kennedy had

lived, maybe he would have reversed his foray into the Vietnam War and not have plunged as deeply into that morass as did his successors. Thousands of our young men might not have perished so senselessly.

Maybe, with a shorter war in Vietnam, our economy would have been better. Maybe, therefore, drugs and crime and violence would not have flourished so expansively.

Maybe. Maybe. The haunting might-have-beens.

What would have been

"Without question, he would have continued to be an extremely active, public-spirited, heavily involved person in all matters that would have to do with social progress and world peace," said Lawrence O'Brien, who was Kennedy's liaison to Congress.

He recalls Kennedy occasionally referring to life after the White House — he would have been only 51 if he'd served the maximum eight years — and the talk revolved around academic life, perhaps at his *alma mater*, Harvard University.

Instead, Harvard renamed its government school in Kennedy's honor as a "living memorial."

David F. Powers, one of Kennedy's closest confidants, envisioned a post-presidential Kennedy as a roving ambassador of sorts. Kennedy used to wonder why former presidents "weren't put to better use," according to Powers, JFK's special assistant. "I think Kennedy would have gone to the Soviet Union or wherever was necessary."

O'Brien and Powers doubt Kennedy would have run for political office after serving two presidential terms, but others wonder.

"It's just possible he might have stayed in politics, going back to the Senate," said Dean Rusk, Kennedy's secretary of state.

McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's national security adviser, took the idea of Kennedy holding public office after the presidency a step further.

"He'd probably agree with Ron



ald Reagan on exactly one subject: that the 22nd Amendment is a nuisance," Bundy said, referring to the constitutional amendment that limits presidents to two terms.

"If they had repealed the 22nd Amendment, let's say five years ago, this (election) might be Reagan vs. Kennedy," he said. "It would be quite an encounter." Kennedy would have been six years younger than Reagan.

"Now the trumpet summons us again, not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need, not as a call to battle, though embattled we are. But a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, a struggle against the common enemies of man — tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself."

After the assassination, they

called Dallas "The City of Hate," a center of right-wing fanaticism.

Kennedy and his aides knew of the climate in Dallas, but they also knew there were many supporters there. The re-election campaign was near, so they went to Dallas and received an enthusiastic welcome.

The president and his wife sat in the rear seat of the presidential limousine, a 1961 Lincoln convertible.

In the front were two Secret Service agents. In the jumpseat between them and the Kennedys were Texas Gov. John Connally and his wife, Nellie.

As the motorcade passed a building called the Texas School Book Depository, Nellie Connally turned to the president and said:

"Mr. President, you can't say Dallas doesn't love you."

"That is very obvious," he answered.

It was 12:30 p.m., CST. A moment later came the shots.

The president said: "My God, I am hit."

The president's wife said: "Oh my God, they have shot my husband. I love you, Jack."

"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility. I welcome it."

M.T. Jenkins, then 46, was chief of anesthesiology at Parkland Memorial. As he ate lunch in the hospital's cafeteria, he was told by a stunned associate that the presi-

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dent had been shot and was being brought to Parkland.

Kennedy was hit by at least two bullets. One penetrated his back and throat; another slammed into his head. He fell forward and downward to the left, into his wife's lap.

Connally was hit in the back by a bullet that passed through him, struck his right wrist and lodged in his left thigh. Most investigators believe this is the bullet that first penetrated the president's back and throat. Connally recovered fully from his wounds.

After several long moments of chaos and horror, the motorcade sped toward Parkland Memorial. Jenkins heard the sirens, and he knew what they were screaming.

Kennedy was unconscious but barely alive when he arrived in Trauma Room 1. The team labored to resuscitate the president without success, and as it did, Jackie Kennedy from time to time entered and left the room.

It was during one of her visits to the emergency room that she nudged Jenkins and opened her cupped, crimson-tinged hands.

Inside the vessel formed by those hands, Jenkins saw a clump of Kennedy's brain. The president's wife had been holding this for many, many minutes.

It is a memory that brings long pauses to Jenkins' conversation.

"She didn't . . . say anything,"

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Kennedy

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Jenkins says. "She . . . just nudged me and handed it to me . . . I guess it ended up in her hand sometime during what happened in the car."

The president was declared dead at 1 p.m., CST.

"And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

How did it happen? Who fired the shots? Was there a conspiracy? To this day, theories abound. Muckrakers and opportunists abound, as well.

The Warren Commission, empaneled by President Lyndon B. Johnson one week after the shooting, heard testimony from 552 witnesses. After nearly a year, it published a detailed report that concluded there was no conspiracy and that all the shots were fired by Oswald.

Many find it hard to accept that no conspiracy existed. Their leading candidates as conspirators: the underworld, Fidel Castro, anti-Cas-

tro Cubans, the Soviet Union, the CIA, the FBI.

A subsequent investigation and report by a congressional panel determined there was a "high probability" of a second gunman and of a conspiracy. But the panel was unable to identify who these people might be.

Most investigators and private citizens are convinced by overwhelming physical and circumstantial evidence that Oswald was the main gunman.

On Nov. 22, Oswald left his wedding ring and his last \$170 on his dresser before departing for the schoolbook warehouse.

The seven-story, brick building sits on the corner of Elm and Houston streets on the edge of downtown Dallas. The Kennedy motorcade passed directly below.

After the shooting, police searching the sixth floor found a rifle later traced to Oswald and three empty shells. Oswald slipped out of the building and was captured that afternoon — after he fatally shot a Dallas police officer.

Two days later, on Sunday, Nov. 24, as the nation watched on live television, Oswald — being transferred from city to county custody — was shot by nightclub owner Jack Ruby.

Oswald was taken to Parkland

Memorial Hospital, where he was treated in the emergency room by a medical team that included Dr. M.T. Jenkins.

There, Oswald died, and the doctor wondered: When is this going to end?

Oswald was buried the next day, Monday, Nov. 24, but not without difficulty.

Only three family members, his wife, mother and brother, showed up at Rose Hill Cemetery, outside Fort Worth. They were joined by scores of reporters and police officers.

Jerry Flemmons, a reporter for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, remembers that the services were delayed "forever" because no one could find pallbearers or a preacher who would officiate at the funeral of a presidential assassin.

Finally, seven men, mostly local reporters, agreed to carry Oswald's casket. And Louis Saunders, president of a local ministerial association, agreed to say a few words on behalf of Oswald. This is the eulogy, in its entirety:

"His mother told me he was a good son, a good husband and a good father."

About the same time, Kennedy was being buried at Arlington National Cemetery in a grave dug with great care by Clifton Pollard.

The grave was five feet deep, three feet wide and eight feet long. Regulation size, but slowly crafted because it was to be a president's grave.

"I took my time," he says now. "I wanted it perfect."

In a city filled with monuments and memorials, the Kennedy grave site remains to many the nation's most emotional symbol of life and death, of hope and lost dreams, even 25 years later.

"Kennedy's grave brings out a lot of emotions in people," said Kerri Childress, the cemetery's historian. ". . . They remember that whole period of their lives, their families, their friends. People tell me they remember smells, sounds."

Adults weep openly at the grave. Admirers silently leave flowers on the granite bed.

A blind woman, after visiting the cemetery dozens of times, cried when she "saw" it for the first time as she was allowed to run her fingers over the stones and feel the heat from the eternal flame.

"The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it, and the glow from that fire can truly light the world."